

**NORTHGATE STAKEHOLDERS GROUP**  
**Public Comment at Stakeholder Group Meetings**  
**May 11, 2004 Handout**

Group ideas for how best to address public comment at Stakeholders Group meetings ranged from keeping it to 15 minutes at the end of the meeting (with a variation) or adding more opportunities for public comment at the beginning and the middle the meeting as well as before the Group takes an action – up to a total of 30 minutes -- to accommodate those who want to provide input.

The approach favored by most Group members would **keep public comment as it currently is** for these reasons:

- The City has asked the stakeholders at the table, an intentionally broad-based group designed to reflect community opinion, to deliberate and advise the City.
- The Group needs the time available at meetings to learn about and deliberate the issues, which are complex.
- Most stakeholders have yet to speak as long as three minutes. Is it reasonable to give observers more time to express their opinions than Group members?
- In addition to the time set aside at the end of meetings, anyone who wants to provide ideas and comment to the stakeholders can do so by
  - Talking to individual stakeholders outside of meetings, when extended discussions can occur;
  - Filling out comment cards or sending comments electronically, where length is not a constraint; which would be forwarded to the Group as a whole;
  - Participating in the regularly-scheduled Community Forums.

It was suggested that people should sign up to comment in advance. Each person would have the right to speak up for three minutes. If the public comment period needed more than the 15 minutes now allotted (another alternative: up to 30 minutes), the Group would have to decide how it wanted to receive the remaining comments (by continuing the meeting until everyone who had signed up to speak had the opportunity or beginning the next meeting with a comment period, or some other approach).

The variation on this approach would keep the public comment period as it is but would add in an opportunity for a few brief, relevant “burning comments or questions” at transition points in the meeting (when the Group was wrapping up discussions on a major topic, before it moved on to the next item on the agenda).

- The advantage of this approach would be that it would let those who want to say something germane to the issue do so while the issue was still before the group. The public comment period at the end of the meeting would allow comment on other issues.

- Concerns about this approach were that
  - It could be difficult to enforce “relevance;”
  - Individuals would still have only very brief times to talk;
  - Those commenting might want to get responses to their comments or questions, which could extend the time beyond Group wishes; and
  - The additional “transitional” comment periods, when added up, would eat into Group time for carrying out its work.

The other approach would be to **provide multiple opportunities for public comment during the meeting (beginning, middle, end, and/or before the Group takes an action) – for a total of up to 30 minutes.** This approach assumes that commenters whose interests are reflected on the Group would primarily communicate with their representative on the Group outside of meeting time. The public comment period would be designed to accommodate those individuals who do not feel represented by anyone at the table or whose perspective is not reflected on the Group. During the comment periods, individuals wanting to speak would each have three minutes. Experience in other groups where this approach has been used suggests that the 30 minutes allotted for public comment would rarely be needed at every meeting.